

# Truly a Home Office

With offices in Indianapolis, the multi-state enterprise is grossing more than \$14 million in sales and is growing by an estimated 15 percent annually.

Headquarters for Luca Pizza is located in a comfortable and cozy one-story ranch-style residence that has been converted into an office complex on busy South Meridian Street on the south side of Indianapolis. Inside, Antonio Di Mizio and his director of operations, William Scott Freeland, are, as always, looking for new ideas. "We're researching different gourmet pizzas, with pesto and other food ideas," reports Freeland, who joined the company in 1980. "We have quite a few ideas in the wings."

But no Buffalo-style wings among them. "We did try wings," says Di Mizio. "We thought adding chicken wings was the thing to do in the pizza business. But, for some reason, in our market, wings didn't sell."

"We also tried cheesecake, but we still haven't found the right dessert. I think the problem was we bought a top-of-the-line cheesecake but then had to sell it for \$2.50."

Explains Freeland, "You could go to any fine restaurant in town and pay more than that for the same quality cheesecake, but in a fast-food outlet, the customer doesn't expect to pay that high a price."

"So, we must ask the question: Where do we draw the line on quality versus an acceptable product that we can sell at a price that the consumer perceives to be a good buy?"

Di Mizio and Freeland feel they know what their customers want and point to "best pizza" honors from the media as proof of customer satisfaction. Throughout the '90s, Luca has garnered the "People's Choice" restaurant award from *Indianapolis Monthly* in the Pizza By The Slice category.

"One of the reasons we've been voted best pizza all these years," says Di Mizio, "is that we consistently maintain excellent quality."

## Chain Concept Maintains Control

While Di Mizio likes the pluses and control of operating a chain, he does not completely rule out franchising, or even the possibility of going public. "If



Di Mizio encourages Luca's managers to maintain the personal touch with customers and to prevent burnout by organizing and delegating duties. The corporate office helps by providing all the computerized services necessary to accommodate its stores' needs.

the situation were right, we'd consider franchising," he says. "People call me about franchising but, at this point, we are able to maintain control of the quality. We have a very good team of professionals with Scott [Freeland] and our regional managers, and I feel that operating as a wholly owned chain is the best way to assure good quality and good service."

"It's very hard to keep up the quality," says Freeland. "It's a fight every day to keep the product really good, and we must constantly work to stay on top of it."

"Everyone claims they use the best ingredients, but we do. Our use of

Grande whole-milk cheese, pure olive oil in the dough and 7/11 tomatoes contributes to higher food costs. We grate our own cheeses, make our own dough fresh from scratch daily, and mix our own sauces."

The pizza, of course, is the star attraction, and Luca management says the key lies in making it fresh and natural. "We're known for our New York-style pizza, though in some of our stores we also make Sicilian pizza," says Freeland. "We prepare pizza by the slice and, just as in New York, we do not use screens, rollers or pins. We cook the pizza right on the hearth, the deck of the oven."



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